

The Dutch and the Founding of New York. Answer the below questions in your journal (not google drive)

1. Read "The Dutch are Missing in the American Curriculum" and
 - a. list a few of the Dutch's contributions to the US.
 - b. Why are the Dutch often ignored in US history classes?
2. Read the excerpt from the book "Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America."
 - a. Simply based on the title of the book what do you think will be the author's thesis?
 - b. How have the Dutch been typically described in early American writing?
 - c. What characteristics does New Amsterdam share with modern New York City?
 - d. To what extent do you think those shared characteristics epitomize your sense of America?

The Dutch are Missing in the American Curriculum

Ann Claunch

The Dutch are missing! Look in any U.S. history textbook. Look under the content standards. Look around the nationally endorsed curriculum—you won't find them. Outside of New York State history classes, there is almost no mention of the Dutch influence in early seventeenth-century America. Fleeting references to the Netherlands as a staging area for the Pilgrims' famous *Mayflower* voyage or the voyage of Henry Hudson are common; however, it is difficult to find anything but a cursory mention of the Dutch influence in America.

A survey of 100 high school students bears this out. I spent a day within the classroom walls of my husband's high school history class and posed the question, "Which countries were involved in the settlement of North America in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?" Student answers included Spain, England, and France. No Dutch.

Therefore, I asked myself, "Why are the Dutch AWOL in American History?" The answer for most teachers is time. It is difficult to find any more room in an already overflowing curriculum cup. As a former teacher, I can understand the problem of finding time within the curriculum to include the Dutch when examining colonial America. As a historian, however, I do not agree that the 55-year period (1609–1664) that the New Netherlands was under the Dutch flag was too brief to warrant finding time in the classroom. Historical significance is not a matter of longevity; it is a matter of legacy—and the Dutch contribution to our fundamental beliefs about acceptance and tolerance, our economic system, and the overall fabric of American culture was highly significant.

The Dutch Legacy

The Dutch believed strongly in tolerance and, especially, religious freedom. Every student learns that the Pilgrims came to America to be free to practice their own religion—but Pilgrim belief in religious freedom applied only to those who believed as they did. However, the official Dutch policy toward religious freedom was grounded in tolerance for all faiths. After the Netherlands gained independence from Spain and were liberated from the oppressive atmosphere of the Inquisition, its government decreed: "Each person shall remain free, especially in religion, and that no one should be persecuted or investigated because of their religion."¹ A statement delivered by a Dutch official during this time captured the belief of the nation: "Strength of the state did not derive its strength from a single faith but from citizens' freedom to worship at their will and intellectual inquiry."²

They brought this notion of tolerance with them to the New Netherlands, and practiced it even after the Dutch settlements fell under British rule. By the 1690s, 30 churches representing five dif-

ferent religions were established in New York City: The Church of England, the Dutch Calvinists, the French Calvinists, the Dutch Lutherans, and the Roman Catholics. Religious tolerance was infused into the American culture, appearing a century later in the U.S. Constitution as religious freedom.

The Dutch legacy is also evident in the Melting Pot aspect of American society. From the beginning, the Dutch welcomed immigrants from all parts of Europe into the New Netherlands, forming the first truly multi-cultural society on American soil. In fact, the New Netherlands was the beginning of the first mixed society. Marriage certificates passed on to the British in 1664 evidenced the diversity of the blend of nations within matrimony.

Standing as a symbol of the Dutch economic legacy is New York harbor, the fundamentals of free trade, and the stock market. The Dutch believed strongly in unrestricted trade and an open port. The first corporate conglomerates began with the Dutch East India Company, which contributed the antecedents of today's stock market.

These issues of trade and corporations, religious freedom, and a tolerant and multicultural society formed an important foundation for the development of America—economically, socially, and culturally. Leaving the Dutch out of the American history curriculum denies students the opportunity to examine the complex nature of colonial America.

Contributions of all who came here to build a

THE ISLAND CENTER

OF THE WORLD

The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and
the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America

DEL NO
RUSSELL SHORTO

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At the book's center is an island—a slender wilderness island at the edge of the known world. As the European powers sent off their navies and adventurer-businessmen to roam the seas in history's first truly global era, this island would become a fulcrum in the international power struggle, the key to control of a continent and a new world. This account encompasses the kings and generals who plotted for control of this piece of property, but at the story's heart is a humbler assemblage: a band of explorers, entrepreneurs, pirates, prostitutes, and assorted scalawags from different parts of Europe who sought riches on this wilderness island. Together, this unlikely group formed a new society. They were the first New Yorkers, the original European inhabitants of the island of Manhattan.

We are used to thinking of American beginnings as involving thirteen English colonies—to thinking of American history as an English root onto which, over time, the cultures of many other nations were grafted to create a new species of society that has become a multiethnic model for progressive societies around the world. But that isn't true. To talk of the thirteen original English colonies is to ignore another European colony, the one centered on Manhattan, which predated New York and whose history was all but erased when the English took it over.

The settlement in question occupied the area between the newly forming English territories of Virginia and New England. It extended roughly from present-day Albany, New York, in the north to Delaware Bay in the south, comprising all or parts of what became New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. It was founded by the Dutch, who called it New Netherland, but half of its residents were from elsewhere. Its capital was a tiny collection of rough buildings perched on the edge of a limitless wilderness, but its muddy lanes and waterfront were provided by a Babel of peoples—Norwegians, Germans, Italians, Jews, Africans (slaves and free), Walloons, Bohemians, Munsees, Montauks, Mohawks, and many others—all living on the rim of empire, struggling to find a way of being together, searching for a balance between chaos and order, liberty and oppression. Pirates, prostitutes, smugglers, and business sharks held sway in it. It was *Manhattan*, in other words, right from the start: a place unlike any other, either in the North American colonies or anywhere else.

Because of its geography, its population, and the fact that it was under the control of the Dutch (even then its parent city, Amsterdam, was the most

liberal in Europe), this island city would become the first multiethnic, upwardly mobile society on America's shores, a prototype of the kind of society that would be duplicated throughout the country and around the world. It was no coincidence that on September 11, 2001, those who wished to make a symbolic attack on the center of American power chose the World Trade Center as their target. If what made America great was its ingenious openness to different cultures, then the small triangle of land at the southern tip of Manhattan Island is the New World birthplace of that idea, the spot where it first took shape. Many people—whether they live in the heartland or on Fifth Avenue—like to think of New York City as so wild and extreme in its cultural fusion that it's an anomaly in the United States, almost a foreign entity. This book offers an alternative view: that beneath the level of myth and politics and high ideals, down where real people live and interact, Manhattan is where America began.

The original European colony centered on Manhattan came to an end when England took it over in 1664, renaming it New York after James, the Duke of York, brother of King Charles II, and folding it into its other American colonies. As far as the earliest American historians were concerned, that date marked the true beginning of the history of the region. The Dutch-led colony was almost immediately considered inconsequential. When the time came to memorialize national origins, the English Pilgrims and Puritans of New England provided a better model. The Pilgrims' story was simpler, less messy, and had fewer pirates and prostitutes to explain away. It was easy enough to overlook the fact that the Puritans' flight to American shores to escape religious persecution led them, once established, to institute a brutally intolerant regime, a grim theocratic monoculture about as far removed as one can imagine from what the country was to become.

The few early books written about the Dutch settlement had a brackish odor—appropriately, since even their authors viewed the colony as a backwater, cut off from the main current of history. Washington Irving's "Knickerbocker" history of New York—a historical burlesque never intended by its author to be taken as fact—muddled any attempt to understand what had actually gone on in the Manhattan-based settlement. The colony was reduced by popular culture to a few random, floating facts: that it was once ruled by an ornery peg-legged governor and, most infamously, that the Dutch bought the island from the Indians for twenty-four dollars.

worth of household goods. Anyone who wondered about it beyond that may have surmised that the colony was too inept to keep records. As one historian put it, "Original sources of information concerning the early Dutch settlers of Manhattan Island are neither many nor rich [for] . . . the Dutch wrote very little, and on the whole their records are meager."

Skip ahead, then, to a day in 1973, when a thirty-five-year-old scholar named Charles Gehring is led into a vault in the New York State Library in Albany and shown something that delights his eye as fully as a chest of emeralds would a pirate's. Gehring, a specialist in the Dutch language of the seventeenth century (an obscure topic in anyone's estimation), had just completed his doctoral dissertation. He was casting about for a relevant job, which he knew wouldn't be easy to find, when fate smiled on him. Some years earlier, Peter Christoph, curator of historical manuscripts at the library, had come across a vast collection of charred, mold-stippled papers stored in the archives. He knew what they were and that they comprised a vast resource for American prehistory. They had survived wars, fire, flooding, and centuries of neglect. Remarkably, he doubted he would be able to bring them into the light of day. There was little interest in what was still considered an odd backroad of history. He couldn't come up with funds to hire a translator. Besides that, few people in the world could decipher the writings.

Two influential Americans of Dutch descent—an investment banker named Ralph L. DeGroff and a retired brigadier general named Cortlandt van Rensselaer Schuyler—then stepped into the picture. Gen. Schuyler had recently overseen the building in Albany of Empire State Plaza, the central state government complex, for his friend Governor Nelson Rockefeller. The two men independently put in calls to Rockefeller, who was by now out of office and about to be tapped by Gerald Ford as his vice president. When DeGroff suggested that the amount needed to launch the translation project was \$25,000, Rockefeller's reply was, "I thought you were talking about real money." Rockefeller made the funds available, and Christoph called Gehring to tell him he had a job. So it was that while the nation was recovering from the midlife crisis of Watergate a window onto the period of its birth began to open.

What Charles Gehring received into his care in 1974 was twelve thousand sheets of rag paper covered with the crabbed, loopy script of seventeenth-

century Dutch, which to the untutored eye looks something like a cross between our Roman letters and Arabic or Thai—writing largely indecipherable today even to modern Dutch speakers. On these pages, in words written three hundred and fifty years ago in ink that has now partially faded into the brown of the decaying paper, an improbable gathering of Dutch, French, German, Swedish, Jewish, Polish, Danish, African, American Indian, and English characters comes to life. This repository of letters, deeds, wills, journal entries, council minutes, and court proceedings comprises the official records of the settlement that grew up following Henry Hudson's 1609 voyage up the river that bears his name. Here, in their own words, were the first Manhattanites. Deciphering and translating the documents, making them available to history, Dr. Gehring knew, was the task of a lifetime.

Twenty-six years later, Charles Gehring, now a sixty-one-year-old grandfather with a wry grin and a soothing, earnestly baritone, was still at it when I met him in 2000. With the support of the Holland Society of New York, he had produced sixteen volumes of translation, and had several more to go. For a long time he had labored in isolation, the "missing floor" of the state library building where he works serving as a nice metaphor for the way his story has overlooked the Dutch period. But within the past several years, Dr. Gehring and his collection of translations have become the center of a modest renaissance of scholarly interest in this colony. As I write, historians are drafting doctoral dissertations on the material and educational organizations are creating teaching guides for bringing the Dutch settlement into accounts of American colonial history.

Dr. Gehring is not the first to have attempted a translation of this archive. In fact, the long, bedraggled history of the records of the colony mirrors history's treatment of the colony itself. From early on, people recognized the importance of these documents. In 1801 a committee headed by none other than Aaron Burr declared that "measures ought to be taken to procure a translation," but none were. In the 1820s a half-blind Dutchman with a shaky command of English came up with a massively flawed longhand translation—which then burned up in a 1911 fire that destroyed the state library. In the early twentieth century a highly skilled translator undertook to translate the whole corpus only to see two years' worth of labor burn up in the same fire. He suffered a nervous breakdown and eventually abandoned the task.

Many of the more significant political documents of the colony were

translated in the nineteenth century. These became part of the historical record, but without the rest—the letters and journals and court cases about marital strife, business failures, cutlass fights, traders loading sloops with tobacco and furs, neighbors stealing each others' pigs—in short, without the stuff from which social history is written, this veneer of political documentation only reinforced the image of the colony as webby and inconsequential. Dr. Gehring's work corrects that image, and changes the picture of American beginnings. Thanks to his work, historians are now realizing that, by the last two decades of its existence, the Dutch colony centered on Manhattan had become a vibrant, viable society—so much so that when the English took over Manhattan they kept its unusually free-form structures, ensuring that the features of the earlier settlement would live on.

The idea of a Dutch contribution to American history seems novel at first, but that is because early American history was written by Englishmen, who, throughout the seventeenth century, were locked in mortal combat with the Dutch. Looked at another way, however, the connection makes perfectly good sense. It has long been recognized that the Dutch Republic in the 1600s was the most progressive and culturally diverse society in Europe. As Bertrand Russell once wrote, regarding its impact on intellectual history, "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Holland in the seventeenth century, as the one country where there was freedom of speculation." The Netherlands of this time was the melting pot of Europe. The Dutch Republic's policy of tolerance made it a haven for everyone from Descartes and John Locke to exiled English royalty to peasants from across Europe. When this society founded a colony based on Manhattan Island, that colony had the same features of tolerance, openness, and free trade that existed in the home country. Those features helped make New York unique, and, in time, influenced America in some elemental ways. How that happened is what this book is about.

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I CAME TO this subject more or less by walking into it. I was living in the East Village of Manhattan, a neighborhood that has long been known as an artistic and countercultural center, a place famous for its nightlife and ethnic restaurants. But three hundred and fifty years earlier it was an important part of the unkept Atlantic Rim port of New Amsterdam. I often took

my young daughter around the corner from our apartment building to the church of St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, where she would run around under the sycamores in the churchyard and I would study the faded faces of the tombstones of some of the city's earliest families. The most notable tomb in the yard—actually it is built into the side of the church—is that of Peter Stuyvesant, the Dutch colony's most famous resident. In the mid-seventeenth century this area was forest and meadow being cleared and planted as Bouwerie (or farm) Number One; the largest homestead on the island, and the one Stuyvesant claimed for himself. St. Mark's is built near the site of his family chapel, in which he was buried. Throughout the nineteenth century New Yorkers insisted that the church was haunted by the old man's ghost—that at night you could hear the echoed clapping of his wooden leg as he paced its aisles, eternally ill at ease from having to relinquish his settlement to the English. I never heard the clapping, but over time I began to wonder, not so much about Stuyvesant, who seemed too forbidding for such a verb, but about the original settlement. I wanted to know the island that those first Europeans found.

Eventually, I got in touch with Charles Gehring. I learned about the extraordinary documents in his keeping and about the organization, the New Netherland Project, he had founded to promote interest in this neglected period of history. In the fall of 2000, I attended a seminar he sponsored on the topic and encountered dozens of specialists who were exploring this forgotten world, unearthing pieces of it that hadn't seen the light of day in centuries. They were digging into archives from Boston to Antwerp and turning up hitherto forgotten journals, voyage diaries, and account books. Our understanding of the age of exploration was expanding under this new examination. In my interviews with Dr. Gehring and others, I realized that historians were fashioning a new perspective on American prehistory, and also that no one was attempting to bring all the disparate elements, characters, and legacies into a single narrative. In short, no one was telling the story of the first Manhattanites.

It turns out to be two stories. There is the small, ironic story that originally attracted me, of men and women hacking out an existence in a remote wilderness that is today one of the most famously urban landscapes in the world, who would shoulder their muskets and go on hunting expeditions into the thick forests of what is now the skyscrapered wilderness of mid-

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founded at this time at the northern end of Manhattan, was a kind of microcosm of this microcosm of the future American society. The initial bloc of thirty-two families who staked out lots along its two lanes came from six different parts of Europe—Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and what is now southern Belgium—and spoke five different languages. Perched alongside one another on the edge of a wilderness continent, families that would have broken up into ghettos in Europe instead had to come together, and learned a common language.

Nothing better shows the kind of mixing that took place in this setting than a phenomenon that was unprecedented elsewhere in the colonies: intermarriage. Scan the marriage records of the Dutch Reformed Church of New Amsterdam and you find a degree of culture-mixing in such a small place that is remarkable for the time. A German man marries a Danish woman. A man from Venice marries a woman from Amsterdam. Isaac Bethloo from "Calis in Vrancryck" (i.e., Calais in France) weds Lysbeth Potters from "Batavia in the East Indies." Samuel Edsall, reared in the English countryside around Reading, finds himself on Manhattan, where he somehow manages to woo a girl named Jannetje Wessels who spent her early years in the wild heath country of Gelderland near the German border. A Norwegian marries a German. Swedish-English. Danish-Swedish. Prussian-German. German-Danish. French-Dutch. In all, a quarter of the marriages performed in the New Amsterdam church were mixed. Intermarriage also appears among the Africans of the population, as when a man from the island of St. Thomas marries a woman from West Africa, and there are instances of marriage between whites and blacks.

It's easy to imagine Van der Donck, newly returned from Europe and strolling through New Amsterdam, comparing the rush of cultures in its streets to the mix he found on the Dam square in Amsterdam. He had come back to witness something that he himself had helped bring about: the forging of America's first melting pot. It so happened that in this melting pot the common language to which everyone defaulted was Dutch. And it was a seventeenth-century Dutch sensibility—a mix of frankness, piety, a keen business sense, an eye on the wider world, and a willingness to put up with people's differences—that formed the social glue. Already, a type was forming, which visitors were beginning to remark on: worldly, brash, confident, hustling.

Of course, equality was not part of the fabric of this pluralistic society. It wasn't even an ideal. Tolerance—call it grudging acceptance—was the major leap forward in human civilization that had recently occurred, which helped form the societies both of the Dutch Republic and the Manhattan colony. But in the seventeenth century no one believed that blacks and whites, men and women, Catholics and Protestants, were equals, or should be treated as such. Last among the unequals were the Africans. The slaves in the colony were the human workhorses. In trying to get a sense of what life was for the African Manhattanites, however, it's necessary to erase from your mind the idea of the fully-formed institution of slavery as it existed in, say, the American South in the early 1800s. The institution was in its early days, and there was a strong belief in the Netherlands that it was morally wrong to buy and sell human beings, so that in the records of the colony you see a queer range of perspectives on Africans and their condition. There is the pious Reverend Jonas Michaelius referring to the black women who have worked in his house as "thievish, lazy, and useless trash," and there is Stuyvesant, sounding the classic slaver, accusing a woman slave of theft, denouncing a man for his "laziness and unwillingness," and decreeing that both be sold "for the maximum profit of the Company." But there are also more than a few cases of owners freeing slaves after a number of years, on the belief that they had done their time, and there are even a few occasions when Europeans are recorded as working for freed Africans. A number of Africans owned property, and Stuyvesant himself declared, in an as-yet unpublished document, that their ownership was to be looked on as "true and free ownership with such privileges as all tracts of land are bestowed on the inhabitants [of this] province." Slaves also had some legal rights: repeatedly, slaves appear in court, filing lawsuits against Europeans.

It's also necessary to keep in mind the scale of slavery in the colony. Manhattan was far removed from the sugar fields of Brazil and the Caribbean, where slave labor mattered. In its first decades there were no more than a few dozen slaves scattered across the colony at any one time; by the time of the English takeover there were about three hundred. What's notable in the records is less the presence of slaves on Manhattan than the development of the West India Company's slave trade. At first the company had refused to sully itself with the slave trade, but after failing in its other business ventures and seeing the money to be made from the transshipping of humans, it

reversed course and became a significant player in one of history's ugliest episodes.

The island of Curaçao was transformed into a processing station for tens of thousands of chained, disease-riddled, and seasickened West Africans, and the records show Stuyvesant—whose title was after all Director-General of New Netherland, Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba—in the midst of running the North American colony, managing from afar his vice-director on Curaçao, Mathais Beck. What jangles in reading their correspondence are the humdrum, helter-skelter inventories of goods being moved around the Atlantic, as in a ship that arrived in Curaçao in August 1660 carrying "724 pine planks . . . 1245 pounds of English hardwood . . . 2 barrels of bacon . . . 75 skipples of peas . . ." and "10 Negroes" valued at "190 pieces of eight."

Africans weren't the only group to receive less-than-equal status. Cultural diversity management was about the last item on Peter Stuyvesant's list of job skills, and it's safe to say he was less than thrilled to see Manhattan's streets becoming an ethnic kaleidoscope. Religion was at the root of it: Stuyvesant despised Jews, loathed Catholics, recoiled at Quakers, and reserved a special hatred for Lutherans. Which is to say, he was the very model of a well-bred mid-seventeenth-century European. Religious bigotry was a mainstay of society. The four New England colonies to the north were founded on it. Across Europe it was universally held that diversity weakened a nation. Of course, the United Provinces of the Netherlands were supposed to be the exception to this rule; but the blanket of tolerance got a bit tattered on the transatlantic voyage. It's strange that the one nod that history has given to the Manhattan-based colony—as a cradle of religious liberty in the early America—is off-base. Not that it is wrong exactly, but it needs to be combed out.

Dutch tolerance was indeed renowned throughout Europe, but it continued to be debated in the country, and every decade or so brought a shift in the prevailing cultural winds. One such shift had occurred in 1651. When the stadtholder, Willem II, died following his attempted coup d'état, leaders of all the Dutch provinces bent toward The Hague for a Great Assembly, the first such gathering since 1579, when the separate provinces met to hash out a common nation. The main topic was supposed to be what to do about the lack of a stadtholder, but the assembly turned into a debate on tolerance. The orthodox Calvinist faction chose the assembly as the occasion to push

the line that the whole tolerance business had gotten out of hand—that, in effect, before you knew it the streets of Amsterdam would be filled with drug dens and legalized prostitution. A wave of headline sentiment rippled outward, and it became fashionable for a time to crack down, in particular, on Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews.

It was in this atmosphere that Stuyvesant, whose feelings were strongly antiversity anyway, moved against the religious groups that had proliferated as the colony had grown. When the Dutch Reformed ministers asked him to block Lutherans from worshipping on the grounds that it "would pave the way for other sects," so that eventually the place "would become a receptacle for all sorts of heretics and fanatics," he did so with gusto. In 1654 twenty-three Jews, some of whom had fled the fall of Dutch Brazil, showed up seeking asylum. You can almost see Stuyvesant shaking his head at being told that, on top of the usual heap of issues he had to deal with, he now had a Jewish population. His reaction was matter-of-fact, and perfectly in character: the Jews were "a deceitful race" that would "infect" the colony if he didn't stop them. He barred one from buying land, "for important reasons." He even refused to allow them to take turns standing guard with the citizens' militia, citing "the aversion and disaffection of this militia to be fellow soldiers of the aforesaid [Jewish] nation." If they didn't like it, he told Jacob Barsimon and Asser Levy in a terse decree, "consent is hereby given to them to depart whenever and wherever it may please them." But Abraham de Lucena and Salvador Dandrada, leaders of the Jews, knew their rights in the Dutch system, and appealed to the Dutch Republic. The Jewish community of Amsterdam applied pressure in the time-honored tradition of politics, and won. Stuyvesant's superiors reminded him loftily of the "each person shall remain free in his religion" law (and added that certain influential Jews had invested a "large amount of capital" in the West India Company), and ordered him to back off.

Step here
But it was English Quakers who pushed tolerance to the limit. They had followed other sects that had fled from Old England to New and then southward into Dutch territory. There they began proselytizing in the largely English towns of Long Island. With their sermonizing and taunting and the jiggling fits of spiritual frenzy for which they were named, they all but invited Stuyvesant's disdain. They were, in his estimation, a threat to the peace and stability of the colony, and probably out of their minds as